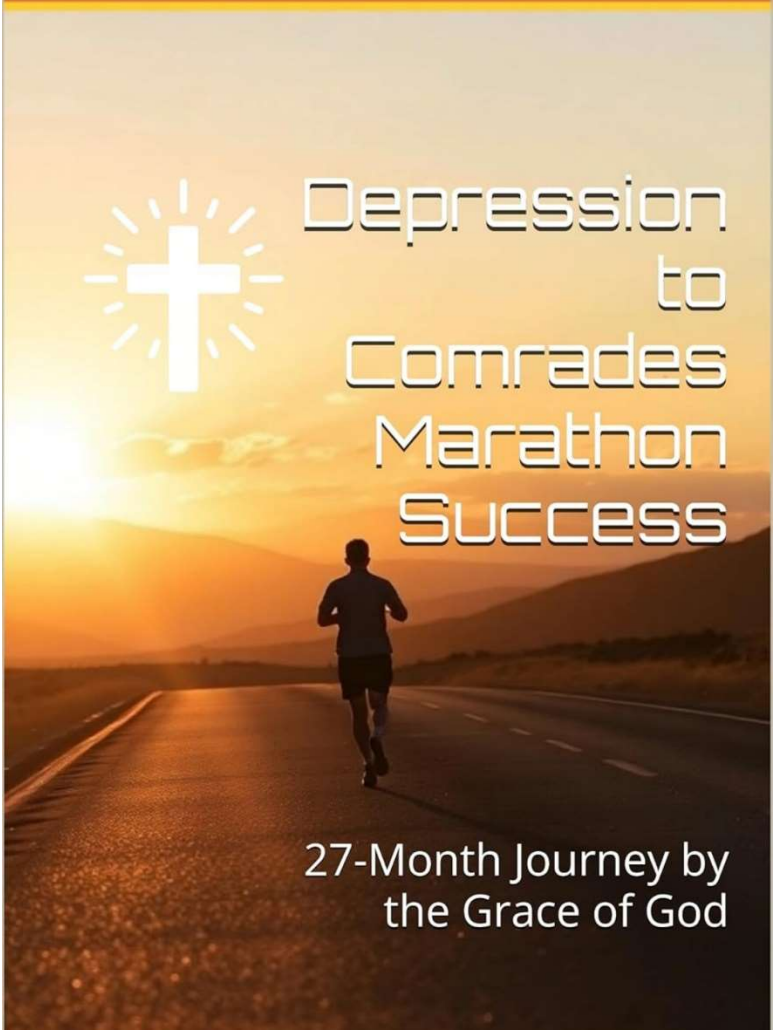
Hermanus Steyn



Depression to Comrades Marathon Success

27-Month Journey by the Grace of God

DEPRESSION TO COMRADES, MARATHON SUCCESS

27-MONTH JOURNEY BY THE GRACE OF GOD

Hermanus Steyn

Depression to Comrade Marathon success

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PREFACE

One morning in October 2024, I woke up and as I stood on my feet, a thought suddenly passed through my mind: “Tell My people what I have done for you.” I paused, startled. How? I wondered. I’m an introvert; I don’t speak easily to others. Then another thought followed: “Write a book.”

I didn’t give it much attention at first and went on with my day. But the very next morning, the same thing happened again—the same words, the same thoughts. It became clear that this wasn’t just an ordinary thought. I realized it must be the Holy Spirit speaking to me.

Over the next three to four weeks, I couldn’t shake off the feeling. The message I had received burdened my heart. It felt like God was nudging me, urging me to take action, but I hesitated. Then, on the morning of Saturday, November 23, 2024, during my quiet time, I turned to God in prayer. I asked for clear guidance: “Abba Father, if it is Your will for me to write a book, please show me a sign.” At that very moment, my wristwatch made a small “beep.” I thought to myself, It can’t be.

The following morning, on Sunday, November 24, 2024, I prayed the same prayer again during my quiet time, still seeking

clarity. Later that morning, as a family, we watched a live-streamed sermon on YouTube from a church in South Africa.

During the sermon, the pastor held up a small packet of seeds. He explained that seeds hold incredible potential, but as long as they remain in the packet, they serve no purpose. You must plant them in the ground for them to grow, bear fruit, and impact people's lives. The pastor compared the seeds to our lives, saying, “What if, at the end of your life, God tells you: ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. Your life had so much potential, but it would have been even better if you had used that potential to make a difference in others’ lives?’”

The moment I heard those words, it felt as though God was speaking directly to me—audibly and unmistakably. Tears rolled down my face as I whispered, “I’m sorry, Abba Father. I’m sorry I didn’t listen the first two times You spoke to me through the Holy Spirit.”

At that moment, I was certain that God was calling me to write this book He wanted me to share my story—to tell people what He has done for me, to inspire others, and to glorify His name.

This book is the result of that calling. It is a testimony of God’s grace, faithfulness, and the power of His love. I hope that through my journey, you will find encouragement, hope, and a renewed faith that God can turn even the darkest moments of our lives into something beautiful.

Enjoy the book.

INTRODUCTION

I stood at the edge of my bed, staring at the floor, feeling as though I were sinking into a dark, endless void. Every day felt heavier than the last, and the thought of doing something as simple as getting dressed seemed impossible. A cycle of self-doubt, hopelessness, and fear gripped me. For a long time, I didn't know how or if I wanted to escape.

Looking back now, I see that moment as the starting line—not of a race, but of a transformation. It wasn't the kind of change that happens overnight. It was a slow, painful process, full of false starts and setbacks. But somewhere along the way, I discovered something that would save my life: running.

This book isn't just about running, though. It's about how I went from feeling completely lost to finding purpose, strength, and hope in God through running. It's about how I turned the darkest period of my life into a stepping stone toward something extraordinary—a journey, by the grace of God, that led me, just 27 months later, to cross the finish line of the Comrades Marathon, one of the toughest ultramarathons in the world.

I'm sharing my story because I know I'm not alone. Maybe you've felt stuck, defeated, or unsure of how to move forward. Maybe you're reading this because you're searching for inspiration, or

maybe you've already started your own journey toward change. Wherever you are, I want you to know that it's never too late to start a journey with God and rewrite your story.

This is mine.

THE DARKEST MOMENTS

Before running became my lifeline, I found myself in a place from which I couldn't see a way out. Depression is challenging to describe to someone who hasn't lived it; it's not just sadness or feeling down. It’s waking up every day with a heavy weight pressing down on you, stealing your energy, your hope, and your will to move forward.

I wasn’t always like this. There was a time when I felt happy, motivated, and full of potential. But somewhere along the way, things began to unravel. Small failures turned into monumental defeats in my mind. I started second-guessing everything about myself—my worth, my abilities, and even my right to take up space in the world.

Every day was a constant struggle between forcing myself out of bed and giving in to the numbness that urged me to stay there. I remember staring at the ceiling for hours, trying to summon the strength to face another day with its problems. It wasn't that I was tired in the usual sense; it was a soul-deep exhaustion that no amount of rest could alleviate.

At first, I tried to hide it. I put on a façade of normalcy, feigning smiles and following the routine. But over time, that mask began to crack. My wife and mother began to notice my withdrawal. I

would respond to their messages with half-hearted reassurance: ‘I’m fine. Just busy.’ But I wasn't fine, and I had no intention of catching up. I was drowning, and I didn't want anyone to see.

Waves of despair came, some stronger than others. I remember it was the beginning of March 2022— one afternoon, sitting at my desk at work, feeling that everything was too much for me. Suddenly, I struggled to breathe. I jumped up and rushed out of my office to get some open air. After a few seconds, I got my breathing back. In that moment, I told myself, ‘This is it. I can’t go on like this any longer.’ The following thought flashing through my mind, "If you don’t change, you’ll leave your wife and child behind. "

But even in the most difficult times of my life—going through depression—there was still a small part of me that refused to give up completely. I believe God was with me through this difficult time, guiding me even when I felt lost. His promises in His Word— ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’—became my anchor, a reminder that I wasn’t alone.” My decision to fight for my life came in tiny, fragile moments of clarity. It was realizing that I didn’t want my story to end this way. It was admitting to myself that I needed help, even though I had no idea where to start.

All I knew at that time was that I must do something to have an active lifestyle. I was searching for something—anything—that could remind me what it felt like to be alive again.

That’s when running found me. I didn’t know it yet, but it would become the lifeline I was so desperately searching for.

DISCOVERING RUNNING

I didn't set out to become a runner. My initial plan was to ride a mountain bike to become more active, just like I had done in my childhood. I bought a mountain bike from my sister, who assured me there was no need to rush to collect it—they would bring it at the end of March 2022 when they passed through my hometown. So, I had to wait until the end of the month to start my fitness journey.

In the meantime, I remembered my sister using a mobile application to track her bike activities. Out of curiosity, I downloaded the app. As I explored it, I noticed it had a section for recording running activities. That's when I discovered that all you needed to start running was a cellphone and a pair of shoes.

The idea of running, however, seemed almost laughable at the time. I wasn't athletic, and I certainly didn't see myself as someone who could lace up a pair of shoes and head out the door for a run. But after my pivotal moment of clarity—when I realized I needed to reclaim my life—I knew I had to try something while waiting for my mountain bike. Anything.

It began with the goal of running 6 kilometers, though I'm not sure why I chose that distance. On Saturday morning, March 12, 2022, I put on a pair of ordinary shoes and stepped outside. I didn't know

anything about running pace, heart rate, or proper form. I just started running. After 200 meters, I was completely exhausted—my lungs burned, and I was out of breath. I stopped and walked for a few minutes before trying to run again. The same thing happened after an additional 200 meters.

It was far from easy, but I told myself I wouldn't give up. I would finish the 6 kilometers, no matter what. Using a run/walk strategy, I completed the distance in 39 minutes and 53 seconds.

The next day, I went out again, taking the same 6-kilometer route. I realized running wasn't straightforward at all—it was hard. I used the same run/walk strategy and finished this time in 41 minutes and 31 seconds. Despite the difficulty, those brief moments of running—no matter how short—sparked something inside me. I wasn't running away from my problems; I was running toward something. Each step felt like a small victory, a defiance of the darkness that had held me captive for so long. Looking back now, I believe God's grace was with me from my very first run, even if I didn't recognize it at the time.

By the end of March 2022, I received my mountain bike and recorded a few bike rides. My longest ride was 70 kilometers. But something had shifted—I had fallen in love with running.

Running became my escape, a way to quiet the noise in my mind and reconnect with my body. It wasn't easy—I was out of shape, and there were days when I wanted to give up. Some days, even the thought of putting on my shoes felt like a monumental task. But every time I finished a run, no matter how short or slow, I felt a little stronger.

I remember one early morning when I managed to jog continuously for a full kilometer. It wasn't much by most standards, but to me, it felt like climbing a mountain. As I stood there, catching my breath, I realized I was capable of more than I had ever believed.

Eventually, running became more than just a physical activity. It became a metaphor for my recovery. Every run was a reminder that I could overcome obstacles, push through discomfort, and keep moving forward— even when it felt impossible.

As the weeks turned into months, I began to notice changes—not just in my body but in my mindset. Every time I came back from a run, I felt so much better. I was sleeping better, eating healthier, and finding joy in small things again. The mornings I used to dread became opportunities for fresh starts.

Running wasn't just helping me heal; it was transforming me. It gave me a sense of purpose, something to strive for when everything else felt uncertain. During my runs, I began to praise God for my health, for the ability to run, and for the sense of freedom I felt in nature.

Later, during my runs, I started having conversations with God, my Heavenly Father. I would pour out my heart to Him, sharing the problems I faced at work and in my personal life. And every single time, God answered me—through sermons on Sundays, through thoughts that I knew could only come from the Holy Spirit, and through a renewed sense of clarity.

I didn't know it then, but this humble beginning was the start of a journey that would take me further than I ever imagined—a journey that would redefine who I was and what I was capable of through God's grace.

EARLY CHALLENGES AND SMALL WINS

The early days of my running journey were far from glamorous. Every run felt like a battle—against my body, my doubts, and the voice in my head constantly telling me to give up. My legs felt like lead, my lungs burned, and I often wondered if I was in over my head. Yet, amid the struggles, I discovered something unexpected: small victories that began to light my path forward.

I vividly remember the soreness that came after my first week of running. My muscles protested every movement, and even walking felt like a challenge. But each ache and pain reminded me of something I hadn't felt in years: I was doing something to change my life. It wasn't easy, but it was real, and it was mine.

The first milestone came quicker than I expected. On Thursday afternoon, March 31, 2022, I completed my first 10-kilometer run successfully in 1 hour and 11 minutes. It wasn't much by most runners' standards, but to me, it felt monumental. I remember standing there afterward, hands on my knees, catching my breath, and feeling something I hadn't felt in a long time—pride.

But running also revealed how deeply ingrained my fears of failure were. On Thursday afternoon, April 21, 2022, I desired to run a half-marathon distance—21.1 kilometers. I started running, and everything went well until kilometer 14. Fatigue began to set in,

and my legs grew heavier with each step. From Kilometer 15 to Kilometer 17, I used a run/walk strategy. But after kilometer 17, even that didn't work anymore. In running terms, I "hit the wall." I was utterly exhausted and had to take a shorter route home, walking the last 1.5 kilometers.

As I walked home, my mind swirled with thoughts: "Why couldn't I run the 21.1 kilometers?" "What am I doing wrong?" "I was convinced I could do it." These thoughts were relentless. But amidst the disappointment, I had a profound realization: they were just thoughts. They didn't have to define or control me.

The next day, determined to learn from the experience, I researched the possible root causes of my struggle. I discovered that my nutrition was insufficient, the water I carried was inadequate, and my running pace in the early stages of the run was far too fast. Then, a thought came to me—one I believe was from the Holy Spirit: "Don't see your failures in running as failures. See them as stepping stones—areas where you need to improve to become a better runner."

A week later, I signed up for a virtual half marathon challenge on Freedom Day, April 27, 2022. On the morning of the race, I felt ready and confident. The failure of the previous week was still fresh in my mind, so I made sure my nutrition was right, I had enough water, and I followed a pace plan. Early in the run, I implemented a run/walk strategy as part of my plan.

I completed the virtual half-marathon challenge successfully in 2 hours and 25 minutes. I was so proud of myself. From no running at all to completing a half-marathon in just seven weeks—it was

an incredible milestone. A few weeks later, I received my medal—my very first running medal. Looking back now, I realize that I only achieved this success in such a short amount of time through the grace of God.

There were plenty of setbacks along the way. Some days, I ran slower than the day before. On other days, life's challenges weighed me down. But I learned to view those challenges not as something negative but as stepping stones to becoming a better person. Running wasn't just teaching me physical endurance—it was teaching me resilience, humility, and the importance of showing up, even when everything felt hard.

As I began to embrace the process, I started to find joy in the small wins. The first time I ran a faster pace, the first time I tackled a slightly longer distance, and even the first time I ran in the rain—they all became moments worth celebrating. Each small victory chipped away at the doubts that had kept me stagnant for so long.

Another pivotal moment came when I shifted my focus from how far or fast I could go to simply getting out the door. I realized that on some days, the hardest part of running wasn't the run itself—it was starting. There were mornings when the weight of life felt overwhelming, but I reminded myself that even a short run was better than none. Every step, no matter how small, was a step away from the darkness I had once felt so trapped in.

I began to notice the changes running brought—not just to my body but to my mindset. With every run, I felt a little stronger, not just physically but emotionally and spiritually. I couldn't thank God enough for leading me to run. Such a simple, straightforward

activity had come to transform my entire life. I started sleeping better, eating healthier, and finding joy in the little things again. The mornings I used to dread became opportunities for fresh starts, and each run became a chance to prove to myself that I was capable of more than I had ever believed.

There were moments of grace, too, when I felt God's presence so strongly that it carried me through the toughest runs. I began using my running time to connect with Him, to pray, and to seek guidance. With every step, I felt His strength replacing my weakness, reminding me that I wasn't running this race—of life or recovery—alone. Through my personal relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, I learned that even in moments of spiritual lows, I could grow closer to Him and know Him more intimately.

The initial months were filled with highs and lows, yet they established the groundwork for all subsequent endeavors. The challenges were real, but so were the wins—no matter how small they seemed. Each step, each moment of pushing through the discomfort, was a reminder that I was moving forward, and that alone was enough to keep me going.

BUILDING MOMENTUM

A New Life Through Running and Faith

Running has become more than just an activity—it is a journey of discovery, healing, and faith. Each stride has brought me closer to understanding my own potential and has deepened my connection with God. From overcoming challenges to achieving milestones, running has transformed my life in unimaginable ways.

Patience and Discovery

One of the most important lessons I learned through running is the value of patience. Progress doesn't happen overnight. It requires consistent effort, faith, and a willingness to learn. Embrace each day with openness to learning. Even elite runners continue to learn from their mistakes and discover new insights.

I discovered that running isn't just about pushing harder or going further. It's about balancing effort with recovery and listening to my body. Understanding this changed my perspective and allowed me to approach training with both humility and confidence. Each training run became an opportunity to grow not just as a runner but also as a person.

Setting New Goals

When I started running, I never imagined I would tackle anything beyond a 5K. Yet, as my confidence grew, so did my ambitions. I set my sights on bigger goals, including my first marathon and eventually the Two Oceans Ultramarathon.

I researched online and found that to sign up for this ultramarathon, I needed to belong to a running club and complete a marathon in under five hours. These requirements seemed daunting at first, but they gave me a clear goal to strive toward. I committed myself to training with discipline and faith, knowing that with God, all things are possible.

The Diamond Marathon: A Breakthrough Moment

On October 1, 2022, it was time to run the Diamond Marathon. This race held significant importance because it was my chance to qualify for the Two Oceans Ultramarathon.

The atmosphere on race day was electric. I felt nervous but prepared, knowing I had done everything possible to get to this point. The race itself was challenging, but I leaned on my faith and the strength I had built over months of training. Crossing the finish line with a qualifying time of 4:55:48 was an emotional moment—I had taken another step toward achieving something extraordinary.

The Two Oceans Ultramarathon

Running the Two Oceans Ultramarathon was an unforgettable experience. The beauty of the course, with its stunning views and steep climbs, was both humbling and inspiring. As I ran along Chapman's Peak and saw how beautiful the ocean is, I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude. I reflected on how far I had come, both in running and in life. The race wasn't easy. There

were moments of doubt and fatigue, but I kept reminding myself of the bigger picture. I thought about Jesus' sacrifice and how His endurance gave me the strength to push through. Every step was an act of faith, and crossing that finish line felt like a victory not just for me but for the person I was becoming. Time – 6:34:28 (2023).

The Role of Community

One of the greatest blessings of my running journey has been the incredible sense of community. From my local running club to fellow participants at races, the support and camaraderie I've experienced have been invaluable. Whether it's cheering each other on during a tough run or sharing tips and encouragement, the running community has taught me the importance of lifting each other up.

Faith and Gratitude

Through running, I've learned to lean on God in all aspects of life. Each milestone has been a reminder of His grace and faithfulness. Running has become a form of worship, a way to honor the body and spirit He has given me.

I've also discovered the power of gratitude. Every race, no matter how difficult, is an opportunity to be thankful—for the ability to run, for the lessons learned, and for the journey itself. This mindset has not only made me a better runner but also a better person.

Closing Thoughts

Running has taught me that life is a marathon, not a sprint. It's about perseverance, faith, and finding joy in the journey. My story is far from over, but with each step, I'm becoming stronger, more grateful, and more in tune with God's purpose for my life.

PREPARING FOR COMRADES

After successfully completing the Two Oceans Ultra Marathon, I felt both proud and humbled. The experience gave me a taste of what it might be like to take on the ultimate challenge of South African running—the Comrades Marathon. However, I understood that the Comrades Marathon was a unique challenge. Spanning over 86 kilometers, it demanded more than just physical readiness. It required grit, a strong mindset, and unwavering faith.

The Decision to Enter

I did not decide to run Comrades lightly. I prayed deeply about it, asking God for guidance and clarity. Was I ready for something this monumental? Could I endure the physical and emotional toll? The more I prayed, the more I felt a sense of peace and calling. I knew this wasn't just about running; it was about demonstrating how far God had brought me from the depths of depression to the start line of one of the world's most iconic races.

Once I made the decision, the real work began. Running a race of this magnitude meant preparing on all fronts—physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Building a Training Plan

The first step was creating a training plan that would allow me to gradually build the endurance necessary to complete the 86-

kilometer journey. I spent hours researching, consulting experienced runners, and learning from their wisdom. I realized that the Comrades Marathon wasn't just about speed or fitness; it was about strategy, pacing, and mental toughness.

My training plan revolved around five key components:

1. Long Runs

Every weekend, I committed to running progressively longer distances to build my endurance. These runs became the cornerstone of my preparation, teaching me to endure hours on my feet and adapt to the inevitable fatigue that would come on race day.

2. Hill Training

Comrades is notorious for its relentless hills, whether it's the "Up Run" or the "Down Run." I dedicated sessions to hill repeats, learning to conquer inclines without losing too much energy and to handle the strain of long descents on my quads.

3. Recovery and Rest

I learned that the body needs time to recover and rebuild after intense training. Integrating rest days and recovery runs was critical. It was a reminder that growth happens during rest, not just during exertion.

4. Nutrition and Hydration

Preparing for Comrades also meant learning to fuel my body properly. I experimented with different foods and drinks to determine what worked best for me during long runs. I found that maintaining proper hydration and consuming the appropriate quantity of energy gels or snacks was crucial to prevent fatigue during prolonged runs.

5. Mental Training

Running comrades is as much a mental challenge as it is a physical one. I practiced staying present during long runs, focusing on one kilometer at a time rather than becoming overwhelmed by the total distance. I also visualized myself crossing the finish line, imagining the sense of accomplishment and gratitude I would feel.

The Role of Community

Joining a running club became an integral part of my preparation. Training with others provided motivation and camaraderie. The club members were like a second family, always ready with advice and encouragement and sharing laughter during long runs. I discovered the unique bond that forms between runners facing the same challenges—it's a camaraderie born from shared sweat, struggle, and triumph.

In addition to my running club, I found support in the broader running community. Social media and forums allowed me to connect with other Comrades hopefuls. We shared tips, training updates, and words of encouragement, creating a virtual network of inspiration.

Spiritual Preparation

For me, preparing for Comrades wasn't just about training my body—it was about preparing my heart and soul. My daily quiet times with God became even more precious. Each morning, I asked for strength, endurance, and guidance. I reflected on Bible verses that reminded me of God's faithfulness and provision, verses like Isaiah 40:31:

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

During my long training runs, I often used the time to pray and reflect. I asked God to help me glorify His name through my running, to remind me that this journey wasn't just about personal achievement but about showing others what faith and perseverance could accomplish.

Facing Challenges

The road to Comrades wasn't without its obstacles. There were days when my body felt exhausted, when the long runs seemed insurmountable, and when doubt crept in. Could I really do this? Was I truly ready for such a monumental challenge?

In those moments, I leaned heavily on my faith. I reminded myself of Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." This verse became my anchor, a constant reminder that I wasn't running this race alone.

Injury was another challenge. During one particularly intense training week, I felt a nagging pain in my knee. It forced me to step back, rest, and focus on recovery. Though it was frustrating to miss training sessions, it taught me the importance of listening to my body and trusting God's timing.

Race-Day Preparation

As race day drew closer, the excitement and nerves began to build. I prepared meticulously, from selecting the right gear to planning my race-day nutrition. I tested everything during training—my shoes, clothing, and even the snacks I would carry.

Packing for Comrades felt surreal. I carefully laid out everything I would need for the race: my running shoes, socks, shorts, and club vest, as well as my energy gels and hydration bottles. Each item symbolized the countless hours of preparation and the journey that had brought me to this moment.

The night before the race, I hardly slept. My mind was racing with anticipation, excitement, and a touch of fear. But as I lay in bed, I prayed for calmness and strength. I reminded myself that I had done everything I could to prepare, and now it was in God's hands.

RACE DAY

The morning June 9, 2024, of the Comrades Marathon felt surreal, as though the months of preparation had finally crystallized into a single defining moment. I woke up before dawn, my alarm cutting through the stillness of the early hours. The room was quiet, but my heart was not. A mixture of excitement, nervousness, and anticipation coursed through me as I sat down for my quiet time with God. I prayed earnestly, asking for strength, endurance, and the grace to honor Him through this journey. My prayer wasn't just about finishing the race; it was about trusting Him to guide me through every step of the 86 kilometers that lay ahead.

The air outside was crisp and cool as I joined thousands of runners converging at the starting line. The streets were alive with energy—a blend of excitement, anxiety, and camaraderie. Runners of all ages and backgrounds surrounded me, each with their own story and purpose for being there. Some were seasoned Comrades veterans, their bibs displaying the number of races they'd completed. Others, like me, were first-timers, unsure of what lay ahead but determined to give it everything we had.

As we lined up, the iconic sounds of Chariots of Fire played through the speakers, followed by the singing of Shosholoza and the South African national anthem. These traditions sent chills down my spine, a poignant reminder of the significance of this race. When the starting gun finally fired, a wave of emotion surged

through me. This was it. Months of training, sacrifice, and prayer had brought me to this moment.

The Early Miles: Settling In

The first few kilometers felt almost effortless. The crowd's energy and the adrenaline coursing through my veins propelled me forward. I reminded myself to stick to my plan: run conservatively, pace myself, and take regular walk breaks. It would be a long day, and I needed to conserve energy for the grueling hills and hours ahead.

The atmosphere along the route was unlike anything I had ever experienced. Spectators lined the streets, cheering and offering water, oranges, and words of encouragement. Their enthusiasm was contagious, and for a while, I allowed myself to soak it all in. I marveled at the diversity of the runners around me. There were those running for charities, others honoring loved ones, and some chasing personal milestones. Each stride I took reminded me of my own reason for being here—to glorify God and celebrate how far I had come since my first hesitant steps as a runner.

The Hills: A Test of Endurance

Known for its relentless hills, the Comrades route quickly made their presence felt. Cowie's Hill, Field's Hill, and countless other climbs stood as daunting reminders of the physical and mental challenge I had signed up for. The first major hill came earlier than I expected, and I quickly realized why it was so critical. My legs already felt the strain, but I focused on maintaining a steady rhythm and using my walk breaks wisely.

"The pain is temporary," I told myself repeatedly, recalling the lessons I'd learned in training. More importantly, I turned my thoughts to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. His

suffering for humanity was far greater than any discomfort I was experiencing now. This perspective shifted my focus away from the pain and toward gratitude for the strength and health it brings to this journey.

As the hours passed, I found myself leaning on the support of fellow runners. There was an unspoken bond between us—a shared understanding of the struggle and determination to keep moving forward. When one runner faltered, others would offer a word of encouragement or a pat on the back. These small acts of kindness reminded me of the strength found in community.

The Heat and Fatigue: Battling the Wall

By the halfway point, the sun had risen high in the sky, causing the heat to intensify. My energy levels dipped, and every step felt heavier than the last. This was the infamous "wall" that so many runners spoke of. My legs ached, my shoulders tightened, and doubts began to creep in. Could I really finish this?

In these moments of weakness, I turned to prayer. "Lord, give me the strength to keep going," I whispered under my breath. I clung to Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Each time I felt like stopping, I reminded myself why I had started—not just for the medal, but to glorify God and prove to myself that I was capable of overcoming even the most daunting challenges.

I also leaned on practical strategies to push through. I alternated between running and walking, broke the race into manageable segments, and focused on reaching the next water station rather than thinking about the kilometers that still lay ahead. At each station, I refueled with energy drinks, bananas, and even potatoes with salt. These small rituals became lifelines, helping me regain my strength and focus.

The Final Stretch: A Battle of Mind and Spirit

With 10 kilometers remaining, exhaustion permeated every aspect of my being. My pace had slowed considerably, and the finish line felt impossibly far. But then I heard a spectator shout, “You’re almost there! Don’t give up!” Those simple words ignited a spark within me. I realized that I had come too far to quit now.

I began to visualize the finish line, imagining the moment I would cross it and the overwhelming sense of accomplishment that would follow. I thought about my sacrifices, hours of training, and countless prayers that got me here. Most importantly, I thought about the people who had supported me along the way—my family, friends, and fellow runners. Their belief in me fueled my determination to keep going.

As I approached the Scottsville Racecourse, the cheers of the crowd grew louder. The sight of the finish line in the distance brought tears to my eyes. It was a moment I had dreamed of for months, and now it was within reach. Gathering all my remaining strength, I increased my pace and triumphantly crossed the finish line. Time – 10:10:38

The Aftermath: A Heart Full of Gratitude

As soon as my feet touched the finish mat, a wave of emotions swept over me. Relief, joy, gratitude, and pride intertwined as I received my medal and realized what I had just accomplished. I had completed the Comrades Marathon—one of the toughest ultramarathons in the world. It fulfilled a dream and served as a testament to the strength of perseverance, faith, and God's grace.

As I sat down to catch my breath, I whispered a prayer of thanks. “Thank you, Lord, for carrying me through this journey. Thank you for giving me the strength and endurance to finish this race.”

The medal around my neck wasn't just a symbol of physical achievement; it was a reminder of God's faithfulness and the incredible transformation He had brought about in my life.

Looking back, race day was more than just a test of endurance; it was a celebration of how far I had come. It was a reminder that with God's grace, anything is possible. Crossing that finish line wasn't the end of my journey—it was the beginning of a new chapter, one filled with hope, purpose, and the unshakable belief that I could overcome any challenge with faith by my side.

REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Crossing the finish line at the Comrades Marathon was a moment I will never forget. It was not just the culmination of months of rigorous training but also a profound personal milestone. The journey to that moment was filled with highs and lows, victories and setbacks, and countless lessons that extended far beyond running. As I look back on this experience, I realize how much it has shaped my perspective, not only as a runner but also as a person.

The Power of a Dream

When I first dreamed of running the Comrades Marathon, it seemed impossible. I was a beginner struggling to run a few kilometers, let alone tackle an ultramarathon. Yet the dream persisted, and I clung to it through every challenge. One of the most significant lessons I learned is that having a big, seemingly unattainable goal can be a powerful motivator. Dreams give us a reason to wake up early, to push through discomfort, and to keep going when it feels easier to quit. The Comrades Marathon taught me that no dream is too big if you are willing to commit to the journey.

The Value of Patience and Consistency

Progress in running, as in life, is not always linear. During my training, there were moments of rapid improvement, but there

were also plateaus and setbacks that tested my resolve. Through it all, I learned the value of patience and the importance of showing up consistently. Every run, no matter how small or slow, was a step closer to my goal. One of the biggest lessons from this journey was the importance of working every day, even when motivation waned.

Consistency taught me that small efforts, when repeated over time, can lead to extraordinary results. There were no shortcuts in my training; every kilometer logged and every recovery day respected contributed to my success. This principle now guides me in other areas of my life, reminding me that steady progress is often more impactful than bursts of effort.

Embracing the Struggle

Running the Comrades Marathon was not easy, and neither was the journey to prepare for it. There were days when my legs ached, the alarm clock felt too early, and when self-doubt crept in. However, I came to understand that struggle is not something to avoid but something to embrace. The difficult moments were the ones that built my resilience and strengthened my character. Each challenge I faced became an opportunity to grow, to dig deeper, and to discover my inner strength.

During the race itself, there were times when the pain felt overwhelming. Yet, I realized that pain is temporary, and the sense of accomplishment that comes from overcoming it is lasting. This perspective helped me push through the darkest moments, not only during the Comrades but also in life. The struggle taught me to find joy in the process and to appreciate the strength that comes from perseverance.

The Importance of Community

One of the most beautiful aspects of this journey was the sense of community I discovered along the way. From my local running club to the strangers cheering from the sidelines, the support of others played a crucial role in my success. Running can often feel like a solitary pursuit, but the camaraderie I experienced reminded me that we are never truly alone.

During the Comrades Marathon, I witnessed countless acts of kindness among runners and supporters. From shared water sachets to encouraging words, these moments of generosity highlighted the power of community. They reminded me of the importance of uplifting others, just as I have been uplifted. This sense of connection is something I carry with me, and it continues to inspire me to be a source of support and encouragement for others.

The Role of Faith

My faith was an integral part of this journey. From the moment I started training to the final steps of the race, I leaned on God for strength, guidance, and endurance. The lessons I learned about faith were profound. I realized that, just as in running, faith requires trust—trust in God's plan, even when the path ahead is uncertain or difficult.

During the toughest moments of the race, I found comfort in prayer and in recalling scripture. Reflecting on the sacrifices Jesus made for me gave me perspective and the strength to keep moving forward. My faith was not only a source of strength but also a

reminder of the importance of gratitude. Every step I took, every breath I drew, was a gift from God, and I was determined to honor Him through my journey.

Discovering My True Self

Running the Comrades Marathon was not just a physical challenge; it was a journey of self-discovery. It revealed my capacity for resilience, discipline, and perseverance. It also exposed my vulnerabilities and weaknesses, forcing me to confront them head-on. Through this process, I gained a deeper understanding of who I am and what I am capable of.

Learning to let go of perfection was one of the most surprising lessons I learned. There were moments during my training and the race where things did not go as planned. I missed workouts, faced injuries, and fell short of my expectations at times. Yet, I learned to be kinder to myself and to focus on progress rather than perfection. This mindset shift was liberating and allowed me to fully embrace the journey, with all its imperfections.

Gratitude and Humility

Crossing the finish line at the Comrades Marathon was a humbling experience. It reminded me of how far I had come and how much I had to be grateful for. From family and friends' support to health and running strength, there was much to celebrate. The journey taught me to appreciate the small victories along the way and to find joy in the present moment.

Running also humbled me by showing me my limitations. No matter how prepared I was, there were elements of the race that were beyond my control—the weather, the terrain, and the

unexpected challenges that arose. These moments reminded me of the importance of humility and of trusting in something greater than myself.

Applying the Lessons Beyond Running

The lessons I learned from running the Comrades Marathon extend far beyond the race itself. They have shaped how I approach challenges in every aspect of my life. I have learned to set ambitious goals, to embrace the process, and to persevere through difficulties. I have also come to value the importance of community, faith, and self-compassion.

For me, running has transcended mere athletics to become a symbol of life. The journey to the Comrades finish line was a testament to the power of determination, faith, and resilience. It showed me that we are capable of so much more than we realize and that the greatest rewards often come from the hardest journeys.

As I reflect on this chapter of my life, I am filled with gratitude for the lessons I have learned and the person I have become. The Comrades Marathon was not just a race; it was a transformative experience that will continue to inspire and guide me in the years to come.

Advice for Others Facing Similar Struggles

If there's one thing my journey has taught me, it's that no struggle is insurmountable. Life's challenges can feel overwhelming, but the path to overcoming them starts with small, intentional steps. Whether you're battling depression, wrestling with self-doubt, or

trying to rebuild after a difficult time, here are some lessons I've learned that might guide you on your journey:

1. Start Small, But Start

When life feels heavy, taking that first step can seem impossible. It doesn't have to be big or perfect; it just needs to happen. Whether it's a walk around the block, reaching out to a friend, or setting a single small goal for the day—progress begins with action. At first, putting on my running shoes and jogging a few hundred meters felt like a daunting task, but that small action paved the way for significant change.

2. Find Your Outlet

Everyone needs an outlet—a way to channel emotions, release stress, and create space for healing. For me, running became that outlet, but for someone else, it might be writing, painting, gardening, or simply spending time in nature. Find something that brings you a sense of peace and allows you to reconnect with yourself.

3. Embrace patience and Grace

Healing and progress take time. It's simple to become frustrated when results don't come quickly, but real growth happens in small increments. Be patient with yourself and understand that setbacks are part of the journey. It's okay to stumble or step back—as long as you keep moving forward.

4. Lean on Faith and Purpose

For me, my faith in God was a guiding light through the darkest moments. It gave me the strength to persevere and reminded me that I wasn't alone. Whatever your source of inspiration—whether

it’s faith, family, or a personal mission—hold onto it tightly. Let it ground you and keep you focused on what truly matters.

5. Celebrate Small Wins

Achieving a monumental goal, like finishing the Comrades Marathon, doesn’t happen overnight. It’s the result of countless small victories along the way. Celebrate those small wins—whether it's getting out of bed on a challenging day, completing a training session, or simply choosing to keep going. Each one is proof of your resilience and progress.

6. Build a Support System

You don’t have to face your struggles alone. Surround yourself with people who uplift and encourage you. Joining a running club connected me with a community of like-minded individuals who shared my passion and offered support during challenging times. A strong support system, whether it's friends, family, or a group of people who share your interests, can make a significant difference.

7. Focus on the Present Moment

Try to concentrate on the present moment instead of dwelling on the past or worrying about the future when life feels overwhelming. Running taught me to live in the now—to feel the ground beneath my feet, hear the rhythm of my breath, and appreciate the journey rather than obsessing over the destination. Practicing mindfulness can help anchor you during tough times.

8. Don’t Be Afraid to Ask for Help

Asking for help is not a sign of weakness—it’s a sign of strength. Whether it’s seeking professional counseling, confiding in a

trusted friend, or turning to your faith community, reaching out for support can provide the tools and encouragement you need to keep moving forward.

9. Believe in the Power of Transformation

No matter how bleak things may seem, remember that change is always possible. When I started running, I never imagined it would lead me to finishing the Comrades Marathon or overcoming depression. Your journey may not look the same, but the potential for growth and healing is within you. Believe in that possibility, even when it's difficult to see.

10. Keep Your Why Close

Remind yourself why you started your journey. For me, it was about breaking free from depression and living a life of purpose and fulfillment. Your "why" will serve as a powerful motivator during tough times, giving you the strength to keep going even when the road feels difficult.

Above all, remember that you are stronger than you think and capable of more than you realize. Every step, no matter how small, on your unique path brings you closer to realizing your true potential.

MOVING FORWARD

The end of one journey is often the beginning of another, and as I reflected on everything I had achieved, I knew my running story was far from over. Completing the Comrades Marathon was a monumental milestone, but it wasn't the final chapter. Instead, it marked a turning point, a springboard for new goals, deeper personal growth, and a desire to inspire others.

Redefining Goals

With the Comrades Marathon behind me, I found myself asking, "What's next?" Running had become more than a passion; it was a way of life. I realized that setting new challenges would keep me motivated and provide opportunities for continuous growth—not just as a runner but as a person.

My next set of goals included improving my personal best times across various distances. The marathon remained a particular focus, and I set my sights on achieving a sub-3:30 time. This goal would require a new level of discipline, training, and refinement of my running techniques. Additionally, I wanted to tackle more ultramarathons, exploring the limits of endurance and discovering how far I could push my body and mind.

Beyond performance goals, I also wanted to diversify my running experiences. Trail running piqued my interest, offering the chance to connect with nature while challenging myself in new ways. Running had taught me to embrace the unpredictable, and trail running's rugged terrain and breathtaking landscapes felt like the perfect metaphor for life itself.

Inspiring Others Through My Story

One of the most humbling realizations was that my story had the power to inspire others. Friends and family began reaching out, sharing how my journey had motivated them to take their first steps toward a healthier and more fulfilling life. Some started running; others applied the lessons of discipline, faith, and perseverance to their own struggles.

This encouragement led me to consider broader ways of sharing my story. Writing this book turned into a passionate endeavor, serving as a means to connect with individuals beyond my personal circle. My hope is that my words will resonate with anyone facing challenges, reminding them that they are not alone and that transformation is possible.

The Role of Faith in the Road Ahead

Faith remained the cornerstone of my journey, and as I looked to the future, I knew it would continue to guide me. My relationship with God had deepened through running, and I viewed every step forward as an opportunity to glorify Him. I committed to honoring the blessings I had received, whether through personal achievements, acts of service, or simply by living my life.

I began incorporating prayer and reflection more intentionally into my runs. Each run became a conversation with God, a time to seek guidance, express gratitude, and align my actions with His will. This spiritual practice enriched my running experience and reminded me that my journey was about more than personal success; it was about living a life of purpose and service.

Lessons for the Future

The journey ahead would not be without its challenges, but I felt equipped to face them with the lessons I had learned:

1. **Consistency is Key**: Success doesn't come from grand gestures but from showing up every day, even when it's hard.

2. **Embrace the Process**: Growth takes time, and the journey is just as important as the destination.

3. **Lean on Others**: Community and support are invaluable. Whether it's fellow runners, friends, or family, we are stronger together.

4. **Faith Over Fear**: Trusting in God's plan has brought me through my darkest moments, and I know it will sustain me in the future.

A Vision for the Future

As I move forward, my vision extends beyond personal achievements. I dream of creating programs to introduce others to

the healing power of running, especially those facing struggles similar to the ones I overcame. Whether it's organizing beginner-friendly running groups, partnering with mental health organizations, or advocating for physical activity in underserved communities, I want to use my journey as a platform for positive change.

On a personal level, I aim to live each day with gratitude and intention. Running will remain a central part of my life, but I've also come to value balance. Spending time with loved ones, nurturing my spiritual growth, and exploring other passions are equally important as I continue this journey.

Closing Thoughts

Moving forward isn't just about chasing the next big goal; it's about living a life that reflects the lessons I've learned and the person I've become. Running taught me to endure, to hope, and to believe in the possibility of change. Faith reminded me that I was never alone, even in my darkest moments. The love and support from those around me demonstrated our connection and ability to uplift each other.

The road ahead is open, filled with challenges and opportunities I can't yet imagine. But I'm ready to face it with an open heart, steady steps, and the unwavering belief that the best is yet to come.

John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"